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"Some Watcher of the Skies"

Notes for Remarks

by

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to

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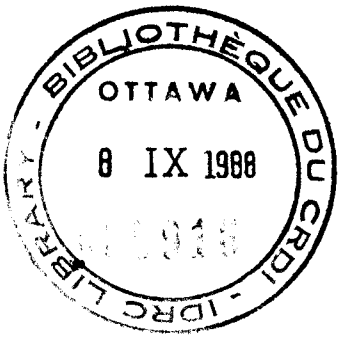

Ethnocentricity, my anthropologist associates tell me, is not necessarily a bad thing. It should be regarded, they say, in the same sense that lawyers approach conflict of interest. What is necessary is the declaration, the admission, the identification of interest which then permits all other actors and adjudicators to be conscious of the potential for misinterpretation or malfeasance. One may laugh or cry when Woody Allen stated "I tended to place my wife under a pedestal," but one knows his point of departure.

One of the critical weaknesses of any culture - and certainly that which we in this continent have inherited from Europe - is its major unstated premise of superiority, in our case its assumption that technological prowess, governmental accomplishment, artistic vibrancy, and economic buoyancy all derive from some innate genetic stamping denied by God or circumstance to those whose standards or achievements or skin pigment are not in accord with our own. Whether or not the premise itself is unstated, the ethnocentricity itself is seldom left unexpressed. Was stout Cortez with eagle eyes and all his men really silent as they stood upon the peak in Darien? Keats says so, but it's unlikely. More accurately expressive of European cultural attitudes during the romantically entitled "great age of exploration" is the evidence found in the darkened interior of the great Jesuit church on the square in Cuzco. Hanging on the walls are paintings which appear to the eye of

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inexpert observers to be remarkable examples of the work of skilled European artists. But in many instances they are not. The triumph is of a different kind entirely. These are the works of talented Andean Indians who had been taught painstakingly to turn their backs on their own culture and to produce instead religious works which reflect in style as well as in content the taste and interest of the conquistadors.

Quite the reverse in concept and value judgement is the brilliant title of this conference. I congratulate the Canadian Association of African Studies for its insightful approach to African issues. I must tell you, however, that my initial impression was somewhat different, based as it was on only partial evidence - the peril of all in the age of hasty communication. I was in Africa participating in a meeting of the IDRC Board of Governors when I received an electronic message from my office which conveyed your invitation but which gave only the first three words of the title - Domination, Resistance, Liberation. Holy smokes, I thought, it's the 1960s all over and I'll probably be expected to participate in a demonstration outside Flora Macdonald's constituency office. Only later did the operative words catch up with me: "in the development of African societies, cultures and states." I relaxed immediately. Put in its entirety, the title fits like an old glove on any

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Albertan as he seethes and schemes about his province's place in confederation. So here I am in Upper Canada, and happily so, especially in the presence of Principal David Smith and the other distinguished speakers on this platform this morning.

II

In Nairobi, during the course of the opening ceremonies associated with the IDRC Board meeting, I had the occasion to address a large gathering at the architecturally superb UN facility, the home of UNEP and Habitat. There, in an endeavour to explain to the audience the distinctive nature of IDRC, I relied upon the perceptive observation of Jomo Kenyatta written 50 years ago as he described the arrogance of expatriates: "With his preconceived ideas, mingled with prejudices, he fails to achieve a more sympathetic and imaginative knowledge, a more human and inward appreciation of the living people ..." I told the audience that IDRC endeavours not to be of that sort, not to second-guess Africans or any others; it endeavours instead to ensure that Africans are influential actors within the Centre, as with the membership on the Board of Governors of Dr. Walter Kamba of Zimbabwe, as with the Directors of the Centre's two Regional Offices in sub-Saharan Africa - both of them Africans, as with the large number of

African scientists who are members of the IDRC professional scientific staff. IDRC is enriched by this composition; we believe that we are able as a result to be more sympathetic, more imaginative, and more appreciative of the peoples of Africa and of their needs.

Kenyatta's criticism came back to me on the weekend as I began assembling my notes for this paper. I was leafing through a scholarly work on African art endeavouring to understand better the meaning of the Bedu mask produced on the conference poster and of its imagery as a protector and preserver of collective harmony, when I encountered a tribute to the genius of the Kingdom of Benin at its height in the 15th century by the German ethnologist Felix von Luschan. He had written in 1919, "Cellini himself could not have made better casts, nor anyone else before or since to the present day." The tribute was undoubtedly sincere and without condition, and likely came as a revelation to European readers of that period. Nevertheless, the analogy has the chauvinistic flavour of the kind of New York Times travel article with which Canadians are so familiar; the sort which describe Lake Louise as every bit as spectacular as the Manhattan skyline.

How should we approach another culture, another society? How best can we as Canadians understand, appreciate and join with those in Africa who are seeking to develop their own societies, cultures and states? Not, certainly, by abandoning our own principles of human dignity and affirmation of the rule of law, but not either from a starting point of supremacy. The attitudes of North to South have all too often reflected paternalism and arrogance, perhaps most evident in our assumptions about Africa. Always <u>from</u> the North <u>to</u> Africa have we installed infrastructure, introduced principles of governance, transferred technologies - always with the assumption that Northern techniques and technologies were superior, were relevant, were transferable, were sustainable. Much more frequently than admitted, these assumptions have proved false.

Our starting point as we look to Africa, I suggest, should at least reflect these failures. In doing so we will be required to exhibit somewhat more humility than is the norm for Northerners looking South. Heretical? Perhaps. So is my suggestion that the absence of humility has on occasion been noted not only in government as is well known, but, perish the thought, even in NGOs and universities. Always for understandable reasons, I'm told. As one wag has stated. "It

was God in His quest of the ideal that created the scholar. Unfortunately the Devil responded by creating the colleague."

III

'Domination' is not sourced solely in external elements anymore than 'resistance' is entirely indigenous. Of relevance to Africa, it seems to me, are three major themes which begin with natural phenomena and reach through to human interventions. This morning I should like to reflect briefly on each as a backdrop to the policies and efforts of those of us dedicated to developmental change in Africa whether we function from the institutional frame of a university, an NGO, CIDA, or IDRC. The first of these themes is obvious. It is the natural environment.

By this I refer to the interaction between the physical features of Africa and those who dwell on that continent. Included in this category is the mix of cause and effect found in rainfall patterns and agricultural practices, climatic behaviour and cultural traditions, geographic formations and demographic dynamics.

Several factors, have an immense impact on food production.

(i) Africa is the only continent that straddles the equator and thus has two substantial arid zones.

(ii) African soils are for the most part older than the Asian soils, possessing fewer nutrients. More fertilizer is needed, yet substantially less is available and used.

(iii) Unlike the temperate zones or humid tropics, the water balance for many regions of Africa is negative -- losses to evaporation and transpiration exceed rainfall. Actual rainfall in semi-arid tropical Africa varies by 50 to 60 per cent or more. By comparison, annual rainfall in the temperate zones of Canada deviates from the norm by about 20 per cent.

(iv) The frailty of the infrastructure supporting African farmers is so marked that production costs are disproportionately high. If African farmers' costs were comparable to those of Asian farmers, the Africans would realize about twice the income they now receive, and consumer prices would be about a fifth of what they are now. These extraordinary differences clearly put the African farmer and consumer at a disadvantage.

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(v) The extreme variation in African soil, climate, and terrain presents a considerable challenge to the increase of agricultural production. The World Bank in its 1978 World Development Report said, "The distinctive and varied agro-climatic and socio-economic environments in Africa make it difficult to introduce agricultural technologies from elsewhere. This applies particularly to the biological and chemical innovations that are needed to increase crop yields by introducing intensive systems of continuous cultivation and replacing the bush fallow system with other and more productive ways to maintain soil fertility. Innovations developed in one area may not be transferable on any broad scale since there are drastic differences in rainfall, soils, and other ecological factors, not to mention cultural diversities, which have produced wide variations in the dominant food crops of different areas. Hence, research to generate and test innovations in materials and practice must often be tailored to specific locations."

The second of my broad themes I describe rather inelegantly as "Planetary Economics". Africa, less certainly than Asia but much more than either continent in the Western Hemisphere, has for centuries past been host to intricate trading patterns which have joined parts of Africa to points far distant. The great civilization of the Upper and Lower Nile with its

commercial links to ancient Greece; the sometimes civil, sometimes aggressive, relations between points in the Mahgreb and Rome; the regular navigation of goods-laden dhows from Arabia down the Indian Ocean coast as far as Zanzibar and return; the network of camel routes that stretched across the Saharan wastes from Mediterranean ports deep into the Sahel; the extensive hinterland of the Kingdom of Benin.

The terms of trade of these mercantile activities altered little through the decades. Immense changes followed only on the arrival of the European powers with their introduction of plantation agriculture. Traditional cropping practices gave way to extensive tracts of groundnuts, cocoa, palm oil, sisal, coffee, tobacco, and cotton. Little of the product was for African consumption; these cash crops were destined for distant markets on terms of trade that left Africans for the first time with virtually no involvement in the negotiations or in the benefits. The Lomé Agreements recognize the inherent vulnerability of African economies to destabilizing price and currency fluctuations of foreign origin, but do nothing to address the essential imbalances.

Terms of trade, access to credit, debt - these are factors that are central if African states are to improve their

economic performance. Each of them reflects ingredients and actors quite beyond the control, and often even the influence, of Africans. They form necessarily an important element in the agenda of the U.N. inspired Program of Action for African Recovery and Development 1986-1990. We are now just past the mid-point of that program and you are all familiar with the results to date. They were well expressed recently by the U.N. Secretary General in these words: "Africa's margins for manoeuvre are being reduced in every aspect." Mr. Perez de Cuellar was reflecting on a range of economic circumstances. World prices for African commodities have sunk to their lowest level in half a century; prices of manufactured goods have risen; private investment has lessened; financial flows to Africa in 1986 were negative: - US$16 billion. The pledged annual inflow of resources has not, in many instances, been met.

Not all of Africa's problems originate elsewhere, of course, and this the U.N. program acknowledged in its assignment of responsibilities. If the commitments of the OECD countries are yet to be honoured, however, such is not the case for many of the undertakings of the African governments. Some 28 African states have adopted structural adjustments to promote agricultural production, to encourage rural development, to revise exchange rates. Region wide, food production rose 3% in

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1986. Some 63% of African countries reporting to the U.N. in their domestic reforms have achieved the target of a 25% allocation of total investment to agriculture. Limitations on central government expenditures have been reduced to 4.5% of GDP.

All those steps are important, but the global economic constraints remain. The result was described by President Kenneth Kaunda at the last OAU summit in these words: "Either we find effective lasting solutions to the debt crisis now, or we will continue to wallow in abject mass poverty for a long time to come."

The third of my themes reflects not at all on the environment or on economics but instead on human behaviour, perhaps the most intractable of all challenges. I call it the "Politics of Privilege".

The history of the human race is not without examples of philanthropy and meaningful cooperation. But in society after society, century after century, the greed of individuals or groups, and the unwillingness of the privileged to be dislodged from entrenched advantage no matter how obtained, illustrates one of the great philosophic dilemmas. In Africa today the endeavour of those who are rich to become richer, of those who are powerful

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to become more powerful, and of those who are disenchanted to reverse their destiny, is as highly motivated and as intensely pursued as anywhere in the world. Heightened in impact by frail regimes of law and justice, yet diluted in effect in some respects by a deep sense of obligation to the extended family, these characteristics deter the emergence of resilient and equitable political and social structures, particularly ones which match effectively the crazy-quilt design of Berlin Conference frontiers.

Most particularly are these patterns abhorrent when they reflect ideology rooted in racism as in the Republic of South Africa. The policies of the government of that country are so repugnant that we are all reminded, whatever our discipline, that the ultimate instrument for the betterment of the human condition will not be found in the accomplishments of either technology or economics. Human dignity is not a product of the laboratory but of human society. The demeaning plight of the multitudes in the southern regions of Africa cannot be relieved absent the application of decency and the honouring of elemental values of equity and participation.

We in the North must accept, however, that like Woody Allen, and despite our good intentions, we often place the

developing countries under a pedestal. Should we continue to do so, whether consciously or not, it will be to our own peril. Our range of assumptions - our ethnocentricity - has led the North to an increasingly debilitating series of attitudes which even now are eroding the privileges which we have long taken for granted and which will in years to come contradict our larger self-interests. This Northern sense of superiority seems directed, unfortunately, at most developing countries.

We in the North observe the rapid destruction of the world's rainforests, the advance of the deserts, and the explosion of populations either with indifference or with a smugness rooted in our assumption that we act otherwise in our hemisphere. In our understandable concern over issues of debt, the penetration by the NICs of Northern markets, the maintenance of defensive alliances, we in the North seem to be unaware of the diminishment of effective government in country after country in the South, of the growing strength and attraction of tribalism, of fundamentalism, of factionalism. We encourage military solutions to socio-economic problems and vigorously promote weapons sales and defence industries even as terrorism proliferates and savage practices escalate. We miniaturize and multiply our weapons of mass destruction on the naive assumption

that their possession and use can be monitored and controlled indefinitely.

We seem as oblivious to the abject misery of hundreds of millions of fellow humans and to the human rights practices of many Southern governments (so long as they profess to be anti-communist) as we are to the extraordinary range of Northern dependencies upon the South. During the past decade, in one of history's most striking ironies, social and economic indicators have fallen in real terms in many countries of the South, at the same time as Northern vulnerability to Southern issues has increased.

And in all, it is rare that we regard the peoples of the developing countries as individuals, even rarer that we treasure their genius, their talent, their potential as contributors to our own richer lives.

IV

Against those three themes - environmental, economic, attitudinal, I'd like to look for a moment at circumstances today in sub-Saharan Africa in particular. In doing so, I'm conscious of the impossibility in a few minutes of disaggregating country

from country, region from region. I'm very aware as well of the misinterpretations and inaccuracies that flow out of sweeping aggregate observations. Nevertheless, I believe that the agonies faced by so many persons in Africa today can well be illustrated by a few compelling statistics, no matter how inexact they may be in certain particular applications.

Briefly said, almost every measurable indicator of every sub-Saharan economy declined during the 1970s and the early 1980s. The World Bank stated recently that "Low-income Africa is poorer in 1986 than it was a generation ago in 1960.... Population growth is largely unchecked, productivity all but stagnant. If present trends continue, the human disaster of 1983-84 in sub-Saharan Africa will return to haunt the world community." What are those aggregate indicators? Here are a few:

- population growth in 1973-83 was 3%; agricultural production in the same decade rose only 1.2%. Only ten sub-Saharan states recorded any increase in per capita food production in that period.

- 1974 African food imports amounted to 2.56 million metric tonnes of cereals; the 1984 figure was 5.19 million metric

tonnes. 1974 food aid, again in cereals was 0.79 million metric tonnes; in 1984 the figure was 2.08 million metric tonnes. The message? Africa as a continent is now severaly devoid of food security.

- the average current account deficit in the 1970s was 4% of GDP; in the 1980s, it became 7% of GDP.

- in the period 1980-84 debt service increased from 18% of export earnings to 26%. (If the successful debt re-scheduling of 14 African states is not counted, the figure becomes 38%.)

- from 1970-1985 per capita income declined in real terms by 12%.

- African infant mortality averages 129/1000; African life expectancy is 45 years.

- the per capita incidence of African doctors declined from 1 per 38,649 in 1965 to 1 per 42,670 in 1985. (Elsewhere, the figures in the non-African least developing countries showed a distinct improvement on a base much higher than the African: from 1 per 8,357 in 1965 to 1 per 5,375 in 1985.)

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These are appalling statistics, a testimony to human indifference. Happily, the rains have improved in the past two years in several regions and good crops have been harvested. Literacy rates are climbing. Export volumes of some commodities are increasing. The economic and social performance of some countries is most encouraging. But these economic and social indicators can at best only check, not reverse, the momentum. They will be of impact only in limited fashion unless the broader picture improves substantially. In sum, as Adebayo Adedeji, the ECA Executive Secretary reported earlier this year: "1987 was a most disappointing year for Africa. Contrary to our expectations, overall economic performance was very poor."

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Mr. Chairman, it was suggested to me by the organizers of this conference that I might say something about the role of each of our organizations in Africa in light of the report of the Winegard Committee, and the government's response. I think I could do that in the course of another hour or so! Yet I would be more foolish than courageous were I to offer specific suggestions to persons so qualified and experienced as are most of you here. After all, I often have difficulty in maintaining my point of view even within my own organization. In a word or two, however, perhaps it would be of interest were I to highlight the perspective of IDRC.

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Working in Africa or elsewhere in the developing regions, IDRC proceeds from certain assumptions. First, that development demands the ability to identify problems and to fix priorities. From IDRC's point of view, this means there must be the local capacity to carry out these steps. Second, that solutions to problems are questionable unless they are locally generated or adapted, are sensitive to local socio-economic circumstances, and are put to use. In short, those solutions which we are all seeking must be responsive to reality.

IDRC assumes that land is a primary development blockage - in terms of soil quality, availability of water and, of course, in terms of ownership and distribution. Finally, in IDRC's view, development is a chimera unless it is sustainable - this reflects the fact that, underneath it all, development is an investment.

These assumptions are pretty self-evident to an audience as perceptive as this one. They were rather novel two decades ago, however, when Parliament began to consider the bill to incorporate IDRC. Nor are those assumptions yet accepted universally, as you know.

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The strength of the Centre, and the influence it is able to bring to bear in countries both North and South, stems from its statutory independence. The continuation of that independence, happily, was recommended by the Winegard Committee and accepted by the Government. It means that the Centre's Board of Governors will continue to be composed of experienced, sensitive individuals, scientists with towering reputations in their own disciplines and extensive developing country experience. These are the persons who craft the Centre's policies, set its priorities, and instruct management. Since the Centre's inception, there has always been a distinguished African on the Board. Over the years these have been drawn from Algeria, Ethiopia, Senegal, Zaire, Nigeria, and now Zimbabwe. To lend further strength to the sensitivity, and to the unique personality of IDRC, each of the Centre's six regional Offices - three of which are in Africa, in Dakar, Cairo, and Nairobi - are under the leadership of Regional Directors from the same continent. This means that the Board and I are given a clear view of each developing region from the perspective of the region.

The Centre believes strongly that technology, as it always has been, will continue to be the most compelling agent of change throughout the world. Developing countries which are

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incapable of devising, adapting and utilizing relevant technologies will be severely hampered. In order to benefit, however, they must possess their own competence in the form of indigenous scientists and technologists. And that competence is lacking. Severely lacking. Recent estimates reveal that of all funds committed to R and D worldwide, only some 3% are expended in the developing countries, a percentage no greater than was the case a quarter century ago. This does not mean that expenditures have not increased - they have, but in a period when the industrialized countries are committing ever more resources to R and D. Expenditure at these levels means that the indigenous scientific communities are inadequate in size even to identify problems, let alone deal with them effectively across the entire spectrum of the natural and social sciences. In an age where technological advances are occurring with breath-taking speed, the gap in capacity between North and South is rapidly widening.

The knowledge now available with respect to agricultural production, primary health care, pedagogy, and economic analysis is not simply transferable but needs to be absorbed by developing countries and utilized in geographic and cultural sensitive fashion. Developing country roots must be put in place to permit the evolution of the newer biological and physical science technologies. Indigenous social scientists must

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measure and interpret the effects of change on society. In their absence, the employment and benefit opportunities which these technologies and these changes promise will not be obtained. There is an immense distance yet to travel.

UNCTAD figures show that the distribution of scientists and engineers worldwide is overwhelmingly concentrated in the North. The rate per 10,000 inhabitants is 95 in the developing countries compared with 285.2 in the industrialized market economy countries and 308.2 in the eastern European countries. That average figure of 95, not surprisingly, is not evenly distributed. The range is from 157.6 in Asia down to 9.6 in Africa. The figure for technicians is even more dramatic, revealing a difference between North and South of an order of magnitude of 10.

The numbers of scientists, engineers and technicians engaged in R and D in the developing countries is less than 1.5 per 10,000 inhabitants, compared with 16.6 in the market economies of the North. It follows that R & D expenditures as a percentage of GNP are heavily in favour of the North. In Africa and Latin America the figure is only 0.2%, and in Asia 0.5%.

The apparent inability of the developing countries to enhance the quality of their human resources, and to dedicate for this purpose a meaningful fraction of financial expenditures, condemns those countries for the foreseeable future to pursue outmoded, low-value economic activity of a kind that is increasingly irrelevant to world market demand. In human terms, it means that the grip of absolute poverty will not be eased and that the scourges of malnutrition and ill-health will persist. The effects of these circumstances are not containable within the developing countries even were that morally defensible, which demonstrably is not so.

VI

IDRC will continue to the best of its ability to respond to these needs, as I know each of the other organizations and institutions present here will rededicate themselves. Yet notwithstanding our efforts, all of the ODA activities worldwide - no matter how brilliantly conceived, no matter how effectively executed - will only be marginal in reversing events which are now of such magnitude, and possessing such momentum, that they threaten the future not just of the inhabitants of Africa or the countries of the South, but of us all. We in the North are now

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hostage to events in the South - population growth, environmental degradation, economic collapse, social instability - which possess the potential to effect negatively the quality of life and the physical security of us and of our children by the turn of the century. We here must join forces to emphasize to Canadians in and out of government that these issues are not time soluble, are not optional, but are essential to our own future. Events in the South, and their effect on the North, are in my judgement the most important category of challenge facing humankind today because they subsume - or inevitably will subsume - all others.

We live not in a changing world, but a changed world. We have scarcely more than a decade to seize control of the immense disequilibria that threaten to imbalance uncontrollably this planet and its inhabitants before the frightening prophecy of François Mitterand comes into focus. In a 1981 interview with James Reston, President Mitterand said:

> "I am convinced that the balance between the two parts of the world, the industrialized nations and the others, will be one of the causes of the most serious tragedies at the end of the century, to be explicit, of world war."

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It is that message that we who are dedicated to development must address with force and conviction, must convey to those who still project echoes of manifest destiny, white man's burdens, or the impenetrability of fortress walls. Canadians, I have always believed, have a sense of realism about issues of this kind. We live in a harsh climate, neighbouring a powerful society. Ours has been a history of adjustment, of management of circumstance, of adaptation and understanding, of humility rather than arrogance. I'm proud of those values and in saying so am revealing my ethnocentricity - but of the definition of Herskovits, himself a distinguished professor of African studies: "a gentle insistence on the quality of one's own group." I state it as one who, like Keats, has "many goodly states and Kingdoms seen."

This conference with its mask symbol is persuasive testimony that those traits as well as harmony and equity and dignity and pluralism are values to be preserved and enhanced in the interests of all members of the human community. As you pursue that goal, I offer you my best wishes.